

CANDIDATE

around, as well as several junior senators who flouted convention in their dress and behaviour. It is still useful to remind ourselves that at this point in his life Caesar was still not all that important. His record so far suggested that he was an up and coming man, likely to have a reasonable career, but once again he was not unique in this. Speaking out for both the *Lex Gabinia* and the *Lex Manilia* was unlikely to win him the deep gratitude of Pompey, for his had been a very minor role. Yet both laws had been controversial, attracting great attention as a number of leading senators spoke out against them in the Senate and in the Forum. Caesar seized the opportunity to be noticed and to be associated with the success of the laws and of Pompey. There was a chance that some small share of the latter's popularity would rub off on him. More importantly he had voiced opinions held by a broad range of citizens, including many equestrians and other moderately prosperous Romans whose vote counted for so much in the assemblies. To espouse popular causes in this way was to be a *popularis*. Although often portrayed in older studies as almost a well-defined political party or grouping, this was no more than a style of politics that relied on winning the support of the people. The Gracchi had been *populares*, as had Marius at times, as well as Saturninus and Sulpicius. Although they raised many of the same issues, these men did not hold a fixed set of common views. Caesar had from early in his career inclined towards a *popularis* path, but in the same way this did not automatically mean that he made common cause with anyone else who acted in the same way, as many did. Politics remained essentially an individual struggle, since everyone else was a competitor. It was not just a question of winning popular acclaim, but of winning more than anyone else.²⁸

Another way in which Caesar sought to woo the electorate was by lavish expenditure. He was appointed curator of the Appian Way, and spent a good deal of his own money to pay for the renovations and improvements he had made to the road and its associated structures. Potentially this offered a good return for his money, for the Appian Way remained one of the most important roads to Rome, so that voters travelling to the city by this route would be given a reminder of what Caesar had done for them. The willingness to spend his own wealth on his fellow citizens doubtless contributed to his election to the post of curule aedile for 65 BC. There were four aediles altogether, but two were exclusively plebian posts and therefore could not be held by a patrician like Caesar. The curule aediles, who could be either patrician or plebian, had the right to sit in a magistrate's official chair, just like praetors and consuls. ~~Sulla had not made the aedileship a~~

~~Temple of Castor for brevity's sake. In the same way it seemed people were talking about the aedileship of Caesar, never of Caesar and Bibulus.³⁰~~

Caesar decided during his aedileship to stage gladiatorial games in honour of his father, who had died some twenty years before. The origin of gladiatorial displays lay in funeral games. At first these had been private, family affairs, but near the end of the third century BC they became public spectacles, with rapid escalation in their scale and splendour. The tradition that such fights could only be staged to commemorate a death of a family member continued down to Caesar's day, in contrast to beast fights, which could be presented as part of a number of different celebrations. Yet it had become little more than a pretext for this form of violent entertainment, which had proved so popular in Rome and throughout Italy. Even so, it was certainly a most unusual step for Caesar to declare funeral games after such a long lapse of time. Yet in many ways the sheer scale of his plans was more exceptional. He began to collect so many gladiators from the schools across Italy that the Senate became nervous. Spartacus' rebellion was still fresh in everyone's memory, while there may even have been fears of what an ambitious man like Caesar could do with so many armed men at his command in Rome itself. Probably as importantly, other senators were reluctant to allow such lavish displays, which would raise the expectation of the audience and so make it more expensive and difficult for everyone else to woo the people in future. As a result, a law was passed limiting the number of gladiators that could perform in any games staged by an individual. It is still reported by our sources that 320 pairs of gladiators appeared in Caesar's games, and that all were equipped with ornate silvered armour. Similarly lavish weapons were also used by the beast fighters in the entertainments staged jointly with Bibulus.³¹

During his aedileship Caesar spent huge amounts of his own money, supplemented by Bibulus' cash in their joint projects. The people of Rome revelled in the shows and games put on for free enjoyment. They disliked any hint of stinginess in those staging the games and would hold this against a man in his future career, just as they would gratefully remember someone who was responsible for a truly impressive spectacle. Yet it was not simply a question of throwing money at the projects, for even expensive games could sometimes fall flat if they were not presented well. Caesar never lacked style in anything he did and his games were a great success. From his point of view, the money that had gone to produce this result had been very well spent. It was his personal money only in the sense that he had borrowed it. Even before he had held any elected office, Plutarch tells us that Caesar was

said to have debts of over 1,300 talents – a total of over 31 million sestertii in Roman currency. (To put this into proportion, the minimum property qualification for a member of the equestrian order at a slightly later date, and probably also at the time, was 400,000 sestertii.) This was a staggering sum, which was then massively increased by his spending as curator of the Appian Way and as aedile. Caesar was gambling on his political future being bright and lucrative enough to cancel out his debts. His creditors were taking the same risk, but presumably had confidence in Caesar to do well. The greatest part of this money was most probably owed to Crassus. Caesar was not the only rising senator he funded in this way, but it is unlikely that he gave others as much leeway to keep on borrowing more and more.³²

There was one last gesture during Caesar's aedileship. At some point during the year, most probably before one of the sets of games, he gave orders for Marius' trophies commemorating his victory over the Cimbri and Teutones to be re-erected in the Forum. Sulla had ordered them to be torn down and probably destroyed, so Caesar most likely had a facsimile set up. As with Julia's funeral, there was a warm response from much of the population to this gesture. Enough people still remembered the fear that the northern barbarians would spill south into Italy and sack Rome again. Marius had saved Rome from this fate, and that was a deed most felt worthy of celebration. One exception was Quintus Lutatius Catulus, consul in 78 BC and like Caesar a pontiff. His father had been consul with Marius in 102 BC and proconsul in 101 BC and had deeply resented the popular hero receiving most of the credit for their joint success. Catulus was now probably the most respected member of the Senate, even if he was not formally the *princeps senatus*, the man whose name appeared first on the senatorial roll. Emphasis on Marius diminished the glory of Catulus' own family. He resented this, but if the stories are true he was also beginning to see Caesar as a reckless and potentially dangerous politician. In the Senate Catulus declared that 'No longer, Caesar, are you undermining the defences of the Republic – now you are launching a direct assault.' Yet for all the elder statesman's *auctoritas*, Caesar replied in a speech that was utterly reasonable and convinced most senators of his innocence. They were probably right, for his career was still in most respects conventional, if flamboyant. Yet revolution was in the air.³³